



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO MEET WITH NUCLEAR MANAGEMENT CO. TO DISCUSS PERFORMANCE OF PALISADES NUCLEAR PLANT

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of Nuclear Management Company on Thursday, May 6, to discuss the results of the agency's assessment of safety performance at the Palisades Nuclear Power Plant during 2003. The facility is located at Covert, Michigan.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the Guesthouse International Lighthouse Inn, 72320 Phoenix Road, South Haven, MI. The public is invited to observe the meeting, and NRC officials will be available before the conclusion of the meeting to answer questions from the public. In addition, the NRC staff will provide an overview of how the agency's Reactor Oversight Process works.

The NRC concluded that the plant operated safely last year. With one exception, all NRC inspection findings during the year were of very low safety significance and safety performance data indicated no issues requiring NRC followup.

One inspection finding was determined to be of low to moderate safety significance, or "white," in the NRC's evaluation which ranges from green, for items of very low safety significance, through white and yellow, to red, for findings of high safety significance.

The "white" finding concerned a loss of offsite power to the plant which occurred March 25, 2003, when a sign post being installed in the plant parking lot damaged a cable. The plant was shut down at the time for refueling. A followup NRC inspection found that the utility lacked adequate procedures over the digging activities, leading to the white safety determination.

Previous NRC assessments in 2002 and 2003 identified weakness in the plant's corrective action program, through which it finds, evaluates, and fixes problems. Since mid-2003, however, the NRC has noted improvements in the utility's problem identification and resolution and now considers the issue to be closed.

In addition to the normal inspection program for Palisades in 2004, the NRC intends to conduct a special inspection to review the utility's corrective actions for the "white" finding involving the loss of offsite power to the plant. Routine inspections are performed by the two NRC resident inspectors assigned to the plant and by inspection specialists from the Region III office in Lisle, Illinois.

A March 4 letter from the NRC to Nuclear Management Company officials addresses the performance of the plant during 2003 and will serve as the basis for the meeting discussion. It is available at:

http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/LETTERS/pali_2003q4.pdf

With regard to security issues, the NRC has issued several orders and threat advisories to enhance security capabilities and improve guard force readiness since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The agency has also conducted inspections to review the implementation of these requirements and has monitored the action of plant operators in response to changing threat conditions. The NRC will continue security inspections during 2004.

Current performance indicators and inspection findings for Palisades are available on the NRC web site at:

http://www.nrc.gov/NRR/OVERSIGHT/ASSESS/PALI/pali_chart.html

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